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AN EMENDATION IN THE OLD ENGLISH VERSION OF BEDE IV 24.

THERE is a passage in the translation of the celebrated chapter containing the Story of Caedmon which, in our opinion, has been misunderstood in all the numerous editions of that Selection. This was natural enough as long as the late MS. Ca. was practically the sole authority for the text. But since T. has been recognized as the comparatively best representative of the original, the correct reading forces itself on the attentive reader without any particular effort on his part. In fact, the emendation we propose is so simple that it does not even necessitate the change of a single letter.

The conversation between Caedmon and the heavenly visitor which precedes the recitation of Caedmon's hymn, runs in the Latin as follows:

'Caedmon, canta mihi aliquid'.—'Nescio cantare; nam et ideo de conuiuio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram.'—'Attamen mihi cantare habes.'—'Quid debeo cantare?'—'Canta principium creaturarum.'

The OE. version reads: 'Cedmon, sing me hwæthwugu.'—'Ne con ic noht singan; ⁊ ic forþon of þeossum gebeorscipe úteode, ⁊ hider gewat, forþon ic naht singan ne cuðe.'—'Hwæðre þu meaht singan.'—'Hwæt sceal ic singan?'—'Sing me frumsceaft.'

It is the spirit's second address we are concerned with: 'Attamen mihi cantare habes.' MS. T., cited above, has: *Hwæðre þu meaht singan*; the other MSS. have a *me* wanting in T.; O. and Ca.: *hwæðere þu meaht me singan*; B.: *hwæðere þu me miht singan*.¹ Now we have not the least

¹ Zupitza and Bright, who, in the main, base their text on T., insert *me*; Zupitza: *hwæðre þû mē meaht singan*; Bright: *Hwæðre þû meaht mē singan*. Sweet follows O. Kluge, in his tentatively West-Saxonized version, reads: *hwæðre ðû mé meaht singan*.

doubt that the deviations of the last three MSS. are aberrations—natural ones, perhaps—and that T.'s reading should be retained, with the slight modification, however, of separating *meaht* into *me aht*: *þū mē āht singan*, which is the correct and, in fact, the required translation of the Latin: *mihi cantare habes*, 'you have to sing,' 'you must sing.' *þū meaht* ('you can,' 'you may') as translation of *habes* is quite unintelligible.

Mæg occurs, of course, with extreme frequency in this, the longest of all Alfredian works (especially in negative clauses), but the Latin verbs rendered by it are *ualeo*, *possum*, *queo*. (Thus, *ualeo* 22, 26; 26, 11; 28, 13; 28, 15; 30, 1; 116, 6; *possum* 28, 12; 36, 26; 36, 33; 38, 3; *queo* 48, 9; 118, 11; 106, 6, etc.) *Āg* is found several times with a noun object as the equivalent of *possideo*, also of *teneo*. (64, 24; 68, 14; 96, 19; 154, 2; cf. 274, 9; 294, 1; 304, 28; 420, 25; besides in passages of freer rendering: 48, 25; 304, 15.) Two further cases of *habere* in the sense of 'have to,' 'ought to'—suggesting, by the way, the formation of the future tense in the Romance languages—have been noticed in the Latin text. In the former, the English version presents a paraphrase rather than a translation: (*Quid opus est eucharistia?*) *neque enim mori adhuc habes*, IV 24—*Ne þinre forþfore swa neah is*, 348, 2 f. More interesting is the other instance, which is found in the Legend of Albanus (I. 7): *quaecumque illi debebantur supplicia, tu soluere habes*; rendered by: *þu scealt ðam ylcan wite onfon, ðe he geearnode* (36, 7). *Sceal* is, to all intents and purposes, synonymous with *āg* in this function.¹

It is also worthy of note that the OE. version of the Caedmon Story, though, on the whole, it is to be called idiomatic and free in syntactic and stylistic respect, yet is faithful and accurate in its rendering of individual words.

¹ Cf. also Lazamon II 276: and swa þu *aʒest* Hengest don; where the younger version has: and so þou *salt* Hengest don. (Quoted by Mätzner.) Similarly in Old Norse, "*eiga*" and "*skal*" are often in the law used indiscriminately, Cleasby-Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dictionary*, s. v. '*eiga*.' On the promiscuous use of *habere* and *debeo*, see Draeger, *Historische Syntax der lateinischen Sprache*, § 414.

In particular, all the auxiliary verbs are translated with perfect correctness. (*magan*=posse 342, 13; 342, 17; 344, 26; 346, 2; 346, 25; besides, *meahte*, in a freely translated passage, without a Latin equivalent, 346, 30; *sculan*=debere 342, 22; 344, 2; cf. 344, 6; 348, 14; further: (*þæt heo þa untrumran . . .*) *inlædon sceoldon* 346, 27 = . . . *induci solebant*; *willan*=uelle 346, 19; *cunnan*=posse 342, 31, = *scire* 342, 30.)

The chance of *magan* having been chosen as the English equivalent of *habere* is infinitesimal.

We can see only two objections that might be raised against the recommended reading.

1. It may be questioned whether *āht* is a permissible form at all. Streitberg, in his *Urgermanische Grammatik*, § 217, has *āht* only, as the 2^d person, but, in all likelihood, he merely gives preference to the historically more correct formation. As a matter of fact, the analogical *āhst* is the usual form, 'the grammar form'. *Āht*, however, is found three times in the Lindisfarne Gospels: Matth. 18, 28 *geld þu aht to geldanne*, = *redde quod debes* (foreshadowing the modern *owe*); Luke 16, 5; 16, 7. But considering the very marked prevalence of Anglian elements in the 'Bede,' it can no longer surprise us to meet with a special Northern form in our text.

2. Is the construction of *āht* with the pure infinitive to be conceded? *Āgan* with *tō* and the inflected infinitive is recorded a number of times. Thus, Alfred's Laws, Introd. 12: *nage he hie ut on elpeodig folc to bebycgganne*; Cnut's Laws I. 4: *micel is and mære þæt sacerð ah to donne*; OE. Chronicle, A. D. 1070 (A), A. D. 1085 (E); The Wulfstan Homilies 238, 1; 279, 18 (for other examples from 'Wulfstan' see Pogatscher, *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur* 25, 5); Lindisfarne Gospels, Matth. 18, 24; 18, 28; Luke 7, 41; 16, 5. Earle's *Hand-Book to the Land-Charters etc.*, p. 265: *swilce hig agon to done*.—We do not remember any other instance of *āgan* with the simple infinitive. But this construction may, without any difficulty, be accounted for by the Latin

model, which was unhesitatingly copied. The pure infinitive in this case is not more suspicious than after *geearnian* (=mereri) 350, 23; 372, 34; 406, 15; 470, 8; *forhycgan* (=contemnere) 76, 29; 464, 10; or *gearo bēon* (roughly corresponding to: uëlle) 56, 20. (Cf. also Wülfing, §§ 480 f.; 487.)—That the construction of *āgan* may nevertheless be considered even as a syntactical idiom accordant with Teutonic traditions, appears from the parallel use of *āga* in Old Frisian, and *haban* in Gothic. (See Richthofen, *Altfriesisches Wörterbuch*, p. 592; J. Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik* IV (1837), p. 93; Balg, *The First Germanic Bible*, pp. 367 f.; also Blackburn, *The English Future; its Origin and Development*, pp. 7 f., 14.)

If we add that in Middle English the present as well as the preterite of *azen* are found with the pure infinitive, just as *ought* occasionally in Early Modern English writings,¹ we may safely regard all possible doubts disposed of.

We hope that no apology is needed for discussing this little point at some length. The verbal change we propose in the reading of this time-honored passage is exceedingly small. But the gain to the sense is important. The traditional *meaht* disturbs the context very seriously and makes the spirit's reply little short of incongruous. By the reintroduction of the original reading perfect order and logical harmony are restored.

FREDERICK KLAEBER.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA.

¹ Mätzner III, p. 6; Koch II,² § 28; Mätzner, *Altenglische Sprachproben, Wörterbuch*, p. 50; Einenkel, *Streifzüge*, p. 233; cf. 116; Abbott, § 349; Kellner, § 392 ff.